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ABSTRACT

This statement, prepared by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Committee on Transfer and the Public Interest (Washington, D.C.), is addressed to institutions, accreditors and national higher education associations seeking to maintain and enhance conditions of transfer for students. It seeks to energize the ongoing national conversation about transfer decision making, setting into motion a more open and accountable transfer process. Many students now attend more than one institution at a time, and accordingly face issues not previously seen when they seek to transfer credits. Institutions must balance responsiveness to students' preferences about transfer with institutional commitment to the value and quality of degrees or other credentials. Accreditors are responsible for assuring that institutional transfer practices are consistent with accreditation standards and policies on transfer. They are responsible for maintaining effective communication among accrediting organizations as a means to meet students' needs in the transfer process while also sustaining quality. While acknowledging that accreditation is an important factor, CHEA believes that receiving institutions ought to make clear their institutional reasons for accepting or not accepting credits that students seek to transfer. They also need to assure that students and the public are fully and accurately informed about their respective transfer policies and practices. Appendix contains descriptions of methods of managing transfer available in addition to institutional transfer decision making. (JA)

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A Statement to the Community:

Transfer and the Public Interest

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This statement, prepared by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation Committee on Transfer and the Public Interest, is addressed to institutions, accreditors and national higher education associations seeking to maintain and enhance conditions of transfer for students.

November 2000

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A Statement to the Community:
Transfer and the Public Interest

In December 1998, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) convened a Committee on Transfer and the Public Interest to examine the role of transfer in higher education. This committee attempted to define the responsibilities of national, regional and specialized accreditors as they work with colleges and universities to assure quality in a changing environment for transfer. This statement, the result of the committee's efforts, is addressed to institutions, accreditors and national higher education associations seeking to maintain and enhance conditions of transfer for students. Transfer issues are not simple, new or easily resolved. This statement seeks to energize the ongoing national conversation about transfer decision-making, setting into motion a more open and accountable transfer process.

"Transfer" as used here refers to the movement of students from one college, university or other education provider to another and to the process by which credits representing educational experiences, courses, degrees or credentials are accepted or not accepted by a receiving institution. The classic form of transfer is vertical transfer, which is to say movement from a two-year college to a four-year college.

Why Examine Transfer at This Time?

Higher education is experiencing a significant change in how students attend college and who provides higher education. Both can have profound effects on students and their opportunities to transfer successfully. The challenge is to make transfer as efficient and effective as possible for those students who have had courses or educational experiences comparable to those offered for credit by the receiving institution. Sound transfer policy and practice, maintaining institutional and accrediting standards, is part of higher education's commitment to students.

Transfer in higher education is more varied and pervasive now than it used to be. In addition to vertical transfer, students now pursue horizontal transfer as they move from one two-year college to another or from one four-year institution to another. Many students now attend more than one institution at a time, and accordingly face issues not previously seen when they seek to transfer credits. Online courses and courses taken in other countries pose yet another set of issues.

Even more students will seek transfer as "new providers" of higher education (e.g., virtual institutions and corporate providers) and distance learning programs offered by traditional providers increase their enrollments. Accreditors and the colleges will have to find new and better ways to meet the need for transfer services.

Among the key indicators of these changes:

- the majority of 1996 baccalaureate graduates attended at least two colleges and universities;
- many students taking distance learning courses are enrolled in another institution different from the distance learning providers;
- students attending corporate universities and certain unaccredited institutions are seeking to transfer their coursework to accredited institutions;
- increasing numbers of virtual institutions and corporate providers are forming partnerships with traditional providers to offer courses and programs; and
- increasing numbers of students are enrolling in foreign institutions and seeking to transfer credits into American colleges and universities.

Finally, proposals for innovative practices pose new ways to manage credit accumulation and transfer (e.g., third-party verification of transfer credits, electronic storage of and instant access to transfer credits for purposes of review). As these new methods of managing transfer transactions gain prominence, they may well influence how transfer decisions are made.

All of these indicators suggest that higher education is changing in ways that make transfer more important to more students and at the same time more complex.

Making Transfer Decisions: Roles and Responsibilities to Assure Quality

Institutions, accreditors and national higher education associations play significant roles and sustain important responsibilities in the transfer process. Each has responsibilities with regard to quality assurance and fairness.

The Role and Responsibilities of Institutions. Colleges and universities are ultimately responsible for decisions about the admission of transfer students and the acceptance or non-acceptance of credits earned elsewhere. Typically, academic faculty and student affairs professionals (working within the framework of faculty rules and standards) determine the transferability of courses and programs. Institutions must balance responsiveness to students' preferences about transfer with institutional commitment to the value and quality of degrees or other credentials.

The Role and Responsibilities of Accreditors. Institutional (national and regional) accreditors have policies and standards that, in turn, call on institutions and programs to develop and maintain clear transfer policy and practices. Accreditors have expectations, for example, that degree requirements for native students be consistent with those that apply to transfer students. Specialized (programmatic) accreditors often have policies or standards to address transfer, with particular attention to admissions practices and assuring equitable treatment for transfer students.

Accreditors are responsible for assuring that institutional transfer practices are consistent with accreditation standards and policies on transfer. They are responsible for maintaining effective communication among accrediting organizations as a means to meet students' needs in the transfer process while also sustaining quality.

The Role and Responsibilities of National Higher Education Associations. For many years, institutions and accreditors have based their scrutiny of transfer primarily on three criteria contained in the 1978 Joint Statement on Transfer and Award of Academic Credit developed by three national higher education associations. These criteria are:

- the educational quality of the sending institution;
- the comparability of credit to be transferred to the receiving institution; and
- the appropriateness and the applicability of the credit in relation to the programs offered by the receiving institution.

National higher education associations lead the ongoing national conversation about transfer. They work with agencies of the federal government to address transfer issues that reach the level of national public policy, and they provide a national voice for assuring that students are well served by transfer practices that meet students' needs while also sustaining the quality of the system itself.

Criteria for Transfer Decisions

CHEA believes that the three criteria of quality, comparability, and appropriateness and applicability offered in the 1978 Joint Statement remain central to assuring quality in transfer decision-making. The following additional criteria expand this list and are offered to assist institutions, accreditors and higher education associations in future transfer decisions. These criteria are intended to sustain academic quality in an environment of more varied transfer, assure consistency of transfer practice and encourage appropriate accountability about transfer policy and practice.

Balance in the Use of Accreditation Status in Transfer Decisions. Institutions and accreditors need to assure that transfer decisions are not made solely on the source of accreditation of a sending program or institution. While acknowledging that accreditation is an important factor, CHEA believes that receiving institutions ought to make clear their institutional reasons for accepting or not accepting credits that students seek to transfer. Students should have reasonable explanations about how work offered for credit is or is not of sufficient quality when compared with the receiving institution and how work is or is not comparable with curricula and standards to meet degree requirements of the receiving institution.

Consistency. Institutions and accreditors need to reaffirm that the considerations that inform transfer decisions are applied consistently in the context of changing student attendance patterns (students likely to engage in more transfer) and emerging new providers of higher education (new sources of credits and experience to be evaluated). New providers and new attendance patterns increase the number and type of transfer issues that institutions will address—making consistency even more important in the future.

Accountability for Effective Public Communication. Institutions and accreditors need to assure that students and the public are fully and accurately informed about their respective transfer policies and practices. The public has a significant interest in higher education's effective management of transfer, especially in an environment of expanding access and mobility. Public funding is routinely provided to colleges and universities. This funding is accompanied by public expectations that the transfer process is built on a strong commitment to fairness and efficiency.

Commitment to Address Innovation. Institutions and accreditors need to be flexible and open in considering alternative approaches to managing transfer when these approaches will benefit students. Distance learning and other applications of technology generate alternative approaches to many functions of colleges and universities. Transfer is inevitably among these.

Finally, CHEA is committed to working with other national higher education associations to convene a group of higher education leaders to address emerging issues for transfer and to develop additional tools and sound practices that can assist institutions as they manage transfer. This national conversation should include attention to how higher education's future will differ from its past and, above all, our responsibilities to students in an increasingly mobile, fast-paced and international environment.

Approved by CHEA Board of Directors, September 25, 2000

Appendix

This appendix contains brief descriptions of methods of managing transfer available in addition to institutional transfer decision-making. It includes a description of transfer and credit equivalency as determined by the American Council on Education's (ACE's) Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials, the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges' (SOC) approach to transfer oversight, and a profile of statewide articulation policies. It also includes a description of the most common method of determining levels of transfer activity or "transfer rates" as developed by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges.

Transfer and Credit Equivalency (American Council on Education)

Colleges and universities are not the sole providers of teaching and learning in higher education. Students can and do receive education and training from a variety of sources including the military, the workplace, apprenticeship and training programs and indigenous high school advanced placement programs. To help institutions reach judgments about how to treat such education for transfer purposes, ACE's Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials operates programs to determine credit equivalencies for various modes of extra-institutional learning. Virtually every higher education admissions office has the following two references, both of which are published by ACE:

- ***The National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs***
  This guide evaluates formal educational programs and courses offered by organizations for their employees, members, or customers and makes college credit recommendations accordingly. These organizations include business and industry, labor unions, professional and voluntary associations, schools, institutes, and government agencies. In addition, the guide contains credit recommendations for courses offered by home-study schools that are accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council.

- ***The Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services***
  This guide evaluates and makes credit recommendations for formal educational programs and courses offered by the United States armed services. The guide also makes credit recommendations for Military Occupational Specialties (MOS). In addition, this guide is available in an online searchable format.

Credit by Examination

ACE evaluates examinations published by a variety of organizations and has recommended college credit for students who are successful in passing them. The more prominent examinations include: the ACT Proficiency Examination Program (PEP); Regents' College Examinations; the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) Program; the College Board's College-Level Examination Program (CLEP); and the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) Subject Standardized Testing (DSST) Program. The examinations cover a wide spectrum of the subject matter taught in higher education.

In practice, the majority of higher education institutions accept the examinations for credit in one form or another. Institutions may have varying standards for acceptance and applicability toward the student's academic program. However, the examinations have been an integral and accepted component of the transfer process for many years. To assist the colleges and universities in making credit decisions, ACE publishes the *Guide to Educational Credit by Examination* that reviews the content and psychometric properties of these

tests and industry certification examinations. Specific credit recommendations are included based on student scoring levels and overall performance.

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) is a consortium of about 1,400 institutions dedicated to helping servicemembers and their families get college degrees. SOC is committed to ensuring that students who are in the military do not have to repeat classes unnecessarily and can achieve their degree goals, rather than just accumulate course credit as they move from place to place. To be a member of SOC, institutions must agree to:

a) design transfer practices that minimize loss of credit and avoid duplication of coursework;

b) limit the amount of coursework that students must take at a single college to no more than 25 percent of degree requirements;

c) award credit recommended by the American Council on Education's (ACE) *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* for military training and experience when applicable to servicemembers' degree programs; and

d) award credit for at least one of the nationally recognized testing programs, such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), the DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST), or the Regents College Examinations (RCE).

SOC also maintains "degree networks" of approximately 130 institutions that agree to a guaranteed transfer system among network members. SOC publishes transferability tables containing those courses that have been identified by degree network institutions as guaranteed to be accepted for transfer. SOC publishes *Credit Education Supplements* that match ACE-recommended credit for military service school courses and occupations with course requirements within the network degree systems. Credit-matching information for national test programs is also provided.

Statewide Articulation Policy

Ignash and Townsend surveyed the fifty states in Spring 1999 to determine which had a statewide articulation agreement, when the agreement was developed, what the agreement included, what sort of communication methods were used to provide information to students and how the agreement was evaluated for effectiveness. Forty-three states responded with usable results. The following table describes types of transfer covered by state policy and the percentage of undergraduates covered by the statewide agreements in the thirty-four states.

	Type of Transfer Covered by State Policy							Percentage of Undergraduate students covered by statewide articulation agreement	
State*	2- to 4-year	2 to 2	4 to 4	4 to 2 (reverse transfers)	Publics Only	Publics and private non-profit	Publics and private for profit	Publics	Privates
Alabama	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Arizona	X							100%	
Arkansas	X	X	X	X	X			100%	
California	X	X	X			X	X	100%	75%
Colorado	X				X			31%	0%
Connecticut	X	X	X	X		X			
Florida	X	X	X			X	X	100%	5%
Georgia	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Hawaii	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Idaho	X	X	X	X		X		100%	50%
Illinois	X	X	X	X		X	X	100%	60–65%
Indiana								100%	0%
Iowa	X							100%	0%
Kansas	X				X			100%	0%
Kentucky	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Louisiana	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Maryland	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Massachusetts	X				X				
Mississippi	X	X			X			100%	0%
Missouri	X	X	X	X	X			100%	
Montana	X	X	X	X	X				
Nevada	X				X			98%	
New Mexico	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
North Dakota	X	X	X	X		X	X	100%	60%
Ohio	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Oklahoma	X	X	X	X	X			100%	0%
Oregon	X				X			100%	
Rhode Island	X		X	X	X			100%	0%
South Dakota	X		X					100%	
Utah	X	X	X	X	X		X**		
Virginia	X				X			100%	
Washington	X					X			
West Virginia	X	X	X	X	X			100%	
Wyoming	X				X			100%	
Total "yes"	33	21	22	19	23	7	4		

*Percentage includes regionally accredited private institutions only.

**Some voluntary compliance among the major, for-profit private institutions.

Source: Ignash, J.M., and B.K. Townsend, (forthcoming 2001). "Statewide Transfer and Articulation Policies: Current Practices and Emerging Issues," Table 9.1: Institutions, Sectors, and Percent of Undergraduates Included in Statewide Articulation Policies, Included in Townsend, B.K., and S. Twombley, eds. "Community Colleges: Policy in the Future Context." *Educational Policy in the 21st Century, Volume 2*. Westport, Connecticut: Albex Publishing.

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Transfer Rate

(Two-Year to Four-Year Institutions)

Since 1989, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges has been collecting data on transfer using the definition, "All students entering the two-year college in a given year who have no prior college experience and who complete at least 12 college credit units within four years of entry, divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at an in-state, public university within four-years." The data show that approximately 22 percent of the entrants who receive 12 credits matriculate at a university. This is assuredly an undercount because the definition omits those who take longer than four years to transfer, who transfer to an independent university, or who transfer out of state. The data regarding numbers of students transferring are remarkably consistent when aggregated nationwide over time. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Graduating Class of 1972, for example, Adelman reported that "1 out of 5 individuals who attend two-year colleges eventually attends a four-year college."

Another way of looking at the community college contribution to students attaining the baccalaureate is by conducting retrospective studies, examining the transcripts of baccalaureate recipients to see how many transferred credits from community colleges. Here the figures usually show that between 30 and 60 percent of the people obtaining degrees from public universities have some community college courses on their record.

The national averages mask the wide variation in transfer rates among states and among colleges in the same state. The range between states is from 11 to 40%, but the range within the state may be from 4 percent to more than 50 percent . Some of the reasons for the wide interstate disparity are related to the history and structure of higher education within a state. Where the two-year colleges were organized as branch campuses of the state university, the transfer rates are high; where they began as technical institutes emphasizing trade and industry programs, the transfer rates are low. Deviations from the norm appear also in states where transfer to independent universities is a prominent feature of the higher education system. Transfer rates among colleges in the same state show wide variation because of local conditions, including community demographics and college proximity to a university campus. However, one conclusion seems clear: transfer rates within a college, college system, or state change little from year to year. They are embedded in institutional histories and circumstances. Most colleges draw the same types of students from the same secondary schools year after year. And they send the same proportion of them on to the same universities. The only trends affecting that situation are massive shifts in community demographics (rare phenomena) or long-term, well-funded occupational programs designed for specific local industries, again, rare phenomena.

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